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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-second session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 30th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 9 April 1996, at 6 p.m.

Chairman:	Mr. LEGAULT (Vice-Chairman)	(Canada)
later:	Mr. MBA ALLO (Vice-Chairman)	(Gabon)

CONTENTS

INDIGENOUS ISSUES (continued)

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In the absence of Mr. Vergne Saboia (Brazil), Mr. Legault (Canada), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6.05 p.m.

INDIGENOUS ISSUES (agenda item 23) (continued) (E/CN.4/1996/83 and 84; E/CN.4/1996/NGO/73; A/RES.50/157; Sub-Com/Res/1994/45; E/CN.4/1995/24; E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/1995/7)

1. Mr. MEJÍA SOLÍS (Nicaragua) said that Latin America's indigenous population of 23 million people, comprising over 400 different ethnic groups, was still severely disadvantaged in both economic and social terms. Nicaragua, as a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, was gratified to note that the international community had finally become aware of the plight of indigenous peoples worldwide and was taking legislative and practical action in the context of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People to redress the situation. His country had participated in the proceedings of the Working Group on the draft "United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples". The excellent quality of the draft declaration augured well for the final product of its deliberations.

2. The Declaration on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations (A/RES/50/6) recognized the right of peoples to take legitimate action in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations to realize their inalienable right of self-determination but added that such recognition should not be construed as authorizing or encouraging any action that would dismember or impair the territorial integrity or political unity of sovereign and independent States conducting themselves in compliance with the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples. His Government, through close dialogue with the country's indigenous peoples, had succeeded in guaranteeing the right to self-determination without undermining political unity. The Statute of Autonomy of the Atlantic Coast regions, which had constitutional status, recognized the rights of indigenous peoples to communal land and religious freedom and accorded them a large measure of legislative and administrative autonomy. His delegation was convinced that, given the political will, it was possible to reconcile a State's political unity and territorial integrity with respect for the rights of indigenous peoples.

3. As part of the vigorous movement towards empowerment of indigenous peoples in Latin America over the previous two decades, Nicaragua, as seat of the Indigenous Parliament of America, had hosted the Inter-American Indian Congress in 1993, which had urged the United Nations to adopt a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples as soon as possible with a view to forging more egalitarian and democratic relations between Governments and indigenous peoples, thereby alleviating economic hardship and enhancing social well-being.

4. As the world prepared to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it was regrettable that no tangible progress had been made towards adopting the draft "United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples". His delegation therefore trusted that the proceedings of the Working Group would be expedited with a view to the speedy adoption of the new instrument.

5. Mr. MIJARUL QUAYES (Bangladesh) welcomed the creation of a new agenda item on indigenous issues, which would help to focus the Commission's previously dispersed discussions on the subject. His delegation would have preferred the more people-centred title "issues relating to indigenous people" or simply "indigenous people", which would have avoided the connotation of local or non-mainstream issues, but recognized that a compromise title was necessary to reconcile differences over the use of the word "people" in the singular or plural.

6. His delegation proposed that the various resolutions on indigenous people that had been adopted should be amalgamated in a single integrated resolution at the current session. To that end, it had prepared a tentative draft resolution that endeavoured to incorporate all the substantive elements of the four separate draft resolutions currently in circulation.

7. The time had come to review the agenda of the Commission's subsidiary bodies in order to eliminate duplication in the debate on indigenous people. In particular, the Commission must decide what approach should be adopted by the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities in order to ensure complementarity of discussion.

8. He expressed satisfaction that the Working Group on Indigenous Populations would be addressing the issue of the definition of indigenous people in the context of the drafting of a "United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples". His delegation also welcomed the Study on Discrimination against Indigenous Populations prepared by the Special Rapporteur on treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements between States and indigenous populations, which shed light on the characteristics of a genuine indigenous people.

9. His delegation would continue to be actively involved in the intersessional work of the Commission and its subsidiary bodies aimed at establishing an institutional mechanism that would address the gross historical injustices experienced by indigenous people.

10. Mr. TCHUMAREV (Russian Federation) said that the work done at the first session of the Working Group on the draft "United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples" was an important step towards safeguarding the culture, traditions and ethnic identity of indigenous peoples. His delegation welcomed the invaluable contribution made to the proceedings by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) representing indigenous peoples and felt that the Committee on Non-Governmental Organizations of the Economic and Social Council should continue to adopt a flexible approach to the participation of such organizations in the Working Group's sessions.

11. Observation of a number of principles would ensure that the draft declaration would be adopted as soon as possible and be recognized as a genuinely universal instrument. For example, its provisions should correspond to those of comparable international instruments and take into account the diverse circumstances of the world's indigenous peoples. Moreover, its provisions should be compatible with existing norms of international law, and

in particular should avoid setting lower standards. Lastly, a pragmatic rather than an idealistic approach should be adopted to the standard-setting process.

12. His delegation considered that consultations on the possible establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people should continue in all relevant United Nations bodies and should involve not only Governments but also representatives of indigenous peoples and experts. It supported the Sub-Commission's recommendation regarding the organization of a second workshop on the subject to consolidate the progress made at the first workshop held in Copenhagen in 1995.

13. The Governments of States in which indigenous peoples lived obviously bore primary responsibility for their welfare, and he noted that even in its present difficult economic circumstances, the Russian Federation was taking vigorous institutional and legislative action to improve their lot. Legislative bodies in regions inhabited by indigenous peoples had drafted proposals on land rights and preservation of their means of subsistence. At the federal level, a State Committee on the Affairs of the Peoples of the North had been established and a number of bills designed to improve their legal, economic and social status were currently before Parliament, and the Government had drawn up a policy document aimed at guaranteeing the rights of indigenous peoples.

14. Mr. MUÑOZ-LEDO (Mexico) said that a large proportion of his country's indigenous population were still living in poverty, relegated to the margins of national development. Under the National Development Plan (1995-2000), President Zedillo had proposed a new deal and a new relationship between society and indigenous groups based on recognition of and respect for cultural diversity.

15. At their summit meeting in Madrid in 1992, the Ibero-American Heads of State had decided to establish an intergovernmental Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean to promote self-reliance of indigenous peoples, communities and organizations.

16. Mexico attached great importance to the activities proposed in connection with the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, in which representatives of indigenous groups from all regions of the world should participate.

17. The proposed permanent forum for indigenous people, representing the culmination of a process initiated a decade previously, would allow indigenous groups to present their views and assert their rights alongside government representatives in the context of the United Nations.

18. The proceedings of the Working Group on the draft "United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples", which had begun its work in November 1995, were highly promising, and the Government of Mexico hoped they would lead to a strengthening of the system for the protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous peoples.

19. His delegation felt that the time had come for the international community to enter into a firm commitment to promote the rights and legitimate aspirations of indigenous peoples and to eliminate the evils of extreme poverty and marginalization. Mexico was one of the few States to have ratified the ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 1989, (No. 169), which was the only international instrument currently in force that applied recent developments in international law to the situation of indigenous peoples. Mexico urged all States that had not yet done so to ratify the Convention.

20. Mexico also supported the efforts of the Organization of American States to prepare an inter-American declaration of the rights of indigenous peoples for adoption in 1997.

The meeting was suspended at 6.35 p.m. and resumed at 6.50 p.m.

21. Mr. Mba Allo (Gabon), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

22. Ms. Margarita ESCOBAR (El Salvador) said her Government supported the inclusion of indigenous affairs as a separate item on the agenda and was of the view that the Commission should adapt its agenda and working methods in the light of the principles and objectives of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, which accorded high priority to indigenous affairs.

23. El Salvador had participated in the first session of the Working Group on the draft "United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples" and was heartened by the progress it had made and by the general debate on the draft declaration. Political will and detailed consideration of the declaration were required to overcome the remaining obstacles to the early adoption of the declaration. In any event, it was encouraging to note that the declaration reflected unity rather than discord.

24. Many indigenous organizations had been unable to participate in the Working Group the previous year for various reasons and El Salvador therefore hoped that the Economic and Social Council would complete its consideration of the applications before it and thus ensure the participation of as many of those organizations as possible. It was also desirable that the Working Group should be provided with the necessary financial resources.

25. She noted that the adoption of a United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, would promote the aims of the Decade, particularly in respect of human rights, environment, education and health, and foster international cooperation in improving the conditions of all indigenous peoples. Furthermore, particular attention should be paid to the specific needs of individual cases and permanent consultation with target groups.

26. United Nations bodies and specialized agencies were urged to play a fundamental role in the achievement of those goals. The adoption of General Assembly resolution 50/157 on the Programme of Action for the International Decade was an encouraging sign of cooperation aimed at improving existing conditions for indigenous peoples. Such activities would place future generations on a footing of equality. Her Government was prepared to

join in efforts to achieve those worthwhile goals and hoped that the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples would be adopted in the first half of the International Decade.

27. El Salvador had consistently supported the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples within the United Nations, and was of the view that the Working Group of the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities provided an appropriate forum for dealing with that question.

28. Mr. SÁENZ (Colombia) also welcomed the discussion of indigenous affairs under a separate agenda item as a clear indication of its growing importance for the United Nations system and Member States. His country had continued to develop constitutional norms ensuring broad recognition of the legitimate rights of indigenous peoples and encouraging the active participation of indigenous organizations and peoples.

29. Steps taken at the national level required parallel action at the international level and vice versa. The international community must therefore continue to regard the various initiatives aimed at attaining the goals of the International Decade, the discussions of the draft declaration and exchanges of views on the establishment of a permanent forum as the ideal strategy for achieving the best results at all levels.

30. He reaffirmed the importance of the International Decade and the debate on the draft declaration in defining terms such as "indigenous people" and noted that, in its Constitution, Colombia recognized indigenous peoples as aboriginal peoples having particular characteristics.

31. His Government believed it was essential to create a specific body within the United Nations responsible for matters connected with respect for and protection and promotion of the rights of indigenous people. Colombia also supported the creation of a permanent forum for indigenous people, with governmental and indigenous representation, to guarantee conditions which promoted the ethnic and cultural development of indigenous groups. That forum should not concentrate exclusively on the claims of indigenous peoples but should take an integrated view of their needs.

32. Coordination among the specialized agencies during the International Decade was vital, as was the need to review existing machinery, procedures and programmes relating to indigenous affairs. In that regard a comprehensive report by the Secretary-General would be most useful. Moreover, all components of the United Nations system committed to the protection and development of the indigenous heritage should observe the guidelines proposed by the Chairperson-Rapporteur of the Working Group.

33. He joined previous speakers in their hope for the early adoption of the declaration by the United Nations General Assembly as a symbol of international recognition of the value and diversity of cultures and the forms of social organization of indigenous populations.

34. Ms. ROY (International Labour Organization) said ILO was continuing its supervision of the two conventions on indigenous and tribal peoples.

Convention No. 169 had been ratified by nine countries and approved by several others. Convention No. 107 remained binding on the 20 States which had ratified it. ILO also provided information on the situation in the States which had ratified those Conventions to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations.

35. Since 1982, ILO had followed the drafting of the declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples and had submitted its comments to the Working Group to ensure the maintenance of established standards. In that connection it drew attention to preambular paragraph 6 of General Assembly resolution 50/157 calling for the compatibility of international instruments and standards applicable to indigenous people.

36. A technical cooperation project, funded by the Danish International Development Aid Agency (DANIDA), had been launched. It would be staffed by two indigenous persons and had been conceived as a means of enhancing ILO's response to requests for assistance from countries which were either preparing for the ratification or improving the application of Convention No. 169, or seeking to improve the application of Convention No. 107. The project was designed to contribute to the development of policy approaches to indigenous questions within the framework of relevant ILO standards, and to strengthen the capacity of indigenous and tribal peoples to participate in the development of relevant national policies. In the long term, the project aimed at increasing awareness of ILO standards during the International Decade and beyond. The new project complemented other ILO projects financed by ILO's regular budget and donors.

37. ILO was contributing to peace-making in Guatemala by supporting the negotiating process, and was pleased to note that the Congress of Guatemala had unanimously ratified Convention No. 169.

38. ILO's Governing Body had approved the follow-up to the implementation of the Platform of Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women which contained a component that was directly related to the task of strengthening the role of indigenous and tribal women in the decision-making process within the framework of Convention No. 169.

39. Mr. WILSON (Observer for New Zealand) said that the establishment of a separate agenda item on indigenous issues reflected the importance now being attached to such matters by the international community and the Commission. His delegation also welcomed the establishment of an open-ended inter-sessional Working Group to elaborate a draft "United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples", and was especially pleased that the practice of involving indigenous people in consideration of the draft declaration had been continued in the Working Group. Indeed, that involvement was an acknowledgement of the substantial contribution already made by indigenous organizations to the development of the draft text. Although many difficult issues remained, good progress had been made in 1995 and New Zealand remained committed to the elaboration of a declaration that would command wide consensus and help to improve the situation of indigenous people.

40. His delegation continued to believe that the Sub-Commission's Working Group on Indigenous Populations should consider ways of strengthening the

participation of indigenous representatives in its work. As Member States undertook their programmes of activities for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, it was important that United Nations bodies and specialized agencies should contribute to the Decade's goals, and New Zealand therefore welcomed the General Assembly's request for a review of existing United Nations mechanisms, procedures and programmes concerning indigenous people.

41. In New Zealand, the underlying theme for the Decade was the Maori language. In addition, activities in 1996 and 1997 would focus on education, and the theme for 1998 would be Toi (the arts), complementing the Aotearoa Festival of Performing Arts, the opening of the new Museum of New Zealand, and the International Festival of the Arts. A committee of Maori representatives had been established to coordinate Decade activities and to consider grant applications. When introducing the resolution concerning the Working Group on Indigenous Populations at the current session, his delegation would propose that it should explicitly recognize the role the Working Group could play in assessing implementation of the programme of activities for the Decade.

42. Ms. THOMPSON (Observer for Costa Rica) welcomed the introduction of a separate agenda item on indigenous issues. In recent years Costa Rica had enacted laws protecting the territorial rights of indigenous peoples and granting citizenship to indigenous people in border areas, and a draft law at present before the Legislative Assembly was aimed at strengthening the concept of self-determination. Costa Rica had recently ratified the ILO's Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (1989) (No. 169), as well as the Agreement establishing the Fund for the Development of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean. New alternative health-care programmes acknowledged the importance of traditional indigenous medicine, and an Indigenous Council had been set up to provide bilingual education in Spanish and any one of the country's six indigenous languages.

43. International cooperation was crucial in finding solutions to the problems faced by indigenous peoples. Costa Rica fully supported the aims of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, but took the view that achievement of those aims required a clear commitment on the part of the United Nations system, Governments, NGOs and the indigenous peoples themselves. Her delegation therefore attached great importance to the appointment of Mr. José Carlos Morales as Focal Point to liaise between indigenous groups and the Centre for Human Rights, and also supported the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system.

44. Mrs. MARKIDES (Observer for Cyprus) welcomed the unanimous decision of the Commission to include indigenous issues as a separate item in its agenda, thus according them the special attention they deserved. Cyprus had noted with satisfaction the report of the Sub-Commission's Working Group on Indigenous Populations (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1995/24), and considered that the adoption by the Working Group and by the Sub-Commission of the draft "United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples" was an important accomplishment. Her delegation also commended the report of the Working Group of the Commission mandated to elaborate a draft declaration (E/CN.4/1996/84), and in particular the measures taken to ensure effective

input by organizations of indigenous people. It was to be hoped that the draft resolution recommending the holding of a further meeting of the Working Group before the fifty-third session of the Commission would be adopted by consensus, and that a draft declaration accommodating all concerns would soon be adopted.

45. The United Nations General Assembly had stated that the adoption of a declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples was a major goal of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and had also emphasized the importance of establishing a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system; her delegation believed that the establishment of such a forum would help to promote the rights of indigenous peoples.

46. Mr. PFIRTER (Observer for Switzerland) reaffirmed Switzerland's conviction, already expressed at the opening of the session of the Working Group responsible for the elaboration of a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples in November 1995, that such a declaration must be adopted as a matter of urgency, since indigenous people had ways of life, traditions, cultures and activities that were not only essential to their own survival, but also beneficial to humankind as a whole. As modern civilization often inflicted serious harm on those peoples, they were in need of special protection of a sort that more general human rights instruments could not provide. Adoption of the declaration must thus not be held up by wrangles about the definition of terms such as "indigenous people". In his delegation's view, the lack of a definition did not constitute an obstacle to the drafting and adoption of the declaration, for the sufficiently precise definitions contained in the 1987 study prepared for the Sub-Commission by Mr. Martínez Cobo and in ILO Convention No. 169 provided adequate guidelines.

47. Mr. QUISPE (Observer for Bolivia) said that Bolivia was a multi-ethnic and multicultural State in which indigenous issues were addressed by the legislative, executive and judicial branches alike. The Legislature included democratically elected indigenous representatives, who had contributed actively to the reform of the Constitution; and, for the first time in the country's history, the ex officio President of the National Congress was of indigenous stock. With indigenous participation, important laws had been enacted, granting legal personality to indigenous groups, defining education as "intercultural and bilingual", and recognizing the traditional system of justice of Bolivia's indigenous peoples and communities. The Ministry of Human Development had set up a National Department for Ethnic Affairs, in which a Consultative Council formulated policies for indigenous peoples. The Judiciary was responsible for providing legal defence free of charge and interpretation facilities for persons whose mother tongue was not Spanish.

48. The Government of Bolivia had established a National Committee to implement the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, in which national indigenous organizations participated, to plan, coordinate, evaluate and promote national activities for the Decade. His delegation considered that the Working Group responsible for the elaboration of a draft declaration had made significant progress and was of the view that the momentum generated must be maintained if discrimination against indigenous peoples and denial of

their rights was to be ended. Lastly, his delegation supported the establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous people within the United Nations system.

49. Mr. ORELLANA (Indigenous World Association) said that the Coordinating Group of Indigenous Peoples of Central and South America, welcomed the inclusion of indigenous issues as a separate agenda item as well as the frequent dialogues it had had with the various regional groups, which had revealed the need to strengthen communication between Governments and indigenous peoples. It called on the international community to adopt the draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples in its entirety since indigenous peoples had participated in its preparation for more than 10 years and had recognized it as an expression of the minimum criteria necessary for their survival. The international community should take account of the benefits that would accrue to all countries if the declaration were adopted, and of the contribution indigenous peoples could make to their countries' economies if their basic rights were guaranteed. Recognition of those rights would lead to the establishment of new relations, in which solutions could be found to the problems of indigenous peoples who, for their part, would acknowledge their responsibility to contribute to the welfare of national societies and States.

50. The proposed permanent forum could play a crucial role in addressing the violence and the critical health and educational problems experienced by many indigenous communities. The indigenous peoples called on the international community and all participants in armed conflicts to put an end to the horrors to which they were subjected in countries such as Guatemala, Mexico and Colombia. The declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples must be adopted as a matter of urgency, and the basic aims of the programme of activities of the Decade must be implemented by all the international, governmental, non-governmental and indigenous bodies concerned.

51. Mr. SJORSLEV (Saami Council), referring to the General Assembly's request that a permanent forum for indigenous people should be set up within the United Nations system, suggested that it could be entitled the United Nations Commission on the status of indigenous peoples and, as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Council, should be able to deal effectively with such issues as the health, development, education, culture and environment of indigenous peoples and help other United Nations organs to devise relevant coherent and coordinated policies and programmes which had to take indigenous views into account. Moreover, there should be indigenous participation in the Decade's theme "Indigenous peoples - Partnership in Action".

52. The draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples, reflecting close consultation and cooperation, was a major breakthrough in that it stated the principle of equality and truly reflected the aspirations of indigenous peoples while testifying to their difficulties. It should not be weakened in any way.

53. The International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples had to achieve more than well-intentioned United Nations resolutions, but resources and a

lack of will were a problem. The Nordic countries were already contributing to the Trust Fund for the Decade, and he hoped that other countries as well as the United Nations itself would allocate sufficient funds.

54. During the Decade the draft declaration should be adopted, international standards for the protection and promotion of the human rights of indigenous peoples should be embodied in a United Nations convention and an effective monitoring system should be established.

55. Mr. HARDBATTLE (Four Directions Council) explained that the Khwe people of Botswana, also known as Bushmen or San, were an ancient indigenous people whose lives were governed by traditions which had enabled them to live in balance and harmony with their fragile, hostile, yet beautiful environment, the Kalahari desert, for more than 40,000 years.

56. The Botswana Government's failure to acknowledge their extensive and profound knowledge of resource management had led to a steep decline in the local game population.

57. Control over their ancestral land, the Sand Face, to which they were attached by deep spiritual links, was the most important issue faced by the Khwe. The discussion of agenda item 23 should therefore include recognition of land ownership rights, access to and use of traditional territories, as well as procedures for political participation in decisions affecting indigenous communities, provision of means for their self-development and the protection and promotion of indigenous culture, knowledge and beliefs.

58. The former policy of trying to integrate indigenous peoples into mainstream culture was no longer acceptable, since its human, social and economic costs were obvious and undeniable. Governments should demonstrate political vision by allowing indigenous peoples to play a central role in deciding their own fate and view that approach as an opportunity, not a constraint.

59. Mr. POMA (World Council of Churches) recalled that in 1990 the Council had sponsored a World Meeting on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation which had adopted a declaration pointing out that humanity had entered a new epoch by acquiring the means of self-destruction. Economic, political and technological progress could not continue at its previous pace. Many people had come to realize that a completely new approach evidencing concern for the whole of God's creation by combining peace, justice and sustainable environmental policies was needed to avert a disaster.

60. Those ideas had been reflected in a statement by the United Nations Secretary-General, at the Rio Summit in 1993, when he had spoken of the spiritual link between ancient cultures and their environment and of the need to create an ethical and political framework enabling humanity to live in harmony with the earth. For indigenous peoples the earth possessed a spirituality that transcended the material world.

61. The draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples echoed those ideas and was linked to the Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 and the Rio Declaration of 1993. It established minimum criteria enabling indigenous peoples to preserve their existence and culture, which had long been in jeopardy.

62. Indeed the text was part of a more far-reaching attempt to ensure mankind's survival, and Governments should not analyse it to see what minimum concessions they should make to indigenous peoples. It would become a basic United Nations document, as it set out the most important requirements for a spiritual compromise between the earth and creation, factors which had been a concern of indigenous peoples for centuries. The text should be respected as it would ultimately benefit the whole world.

63. The World Council of Churches called for the immediate establishment of machinery for the distribution of the voluntary fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People, and supported the establishment of a permanent forum together with further studies on, and a dialogue with, indigenous peoples.

64. Ms. GARSTANG (Asian Buddhists Conference for Peace) considered that the first session of the Commission on Human Rights to address the question of indigenous peoples as a separate agenda item was a significant step towards the realization of true equality for all peoples.

65. Indigenous peoples were entitled to recognition as separate peoples. All over the world they faced marginalization, impoverishment, erosion of their rights and dispossession of their ancestral lands.

66. The fate of the indigenous peoples of the Chittagong Hill Tracts illustrated the disastrous effects of poorly conceived government policies on an indigenous people who had been neither informed nor consulted about them.

67. Racial tension was mounting in the Hill Tracts, where a number of human rights violations had occurred, and some of the indigenous people had formed a movement for regional autonomy. After 20 years of struggle, negotiations had begun between the Government and the Jana Samhati Sanghati, the main indigenous organization, but scant progress had been made and no negotiated settlement had been reached.

68. It was to be hoped that during the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People talks would help to resolve the conflict and, to that end, the Conference requested the appointment of a United Nations team of observers to monitor the dialogue and restore peace to the Hill Tracts of Bangladesh.

The meeting rose at 9.05 p.m.